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Washington Committee for Democratic Action

Chapter, National Federation for Constitutional Liberties



1410 H Street, N. W.—Room 312—Phone NAational 3765—Washington, D. C. June 13, 1941

CHAIRMAN

Hugh Miller

Dear Friend;

VICE-CHAIRMEN

Charles Houston
Alice Barrows
Eve Budd

Our old friends, the Dies Committee Detective Agency Extraordinary, are at it again. This time they are spending your, and other taxpayers', money to question Government workers as to their private activities and beliefs.

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Since we have received a number of inquiries, we have decided to send this letter in order to tell you that if you receive a visit from Dies Committee agents -- either at your office or at home -- they have no right to require you to answer their questions. You are under no obligation to answer questions unless subpoenaed to appear before the Committee. Even in case of that remote possibility, you have a reasonable time within which to appear and to obtain counsel and, when you appear, you need answer only questions pertinent to the legitimate purposes of the Committee. Further, you need not appear at all unless a Committee member -- that is, a Congressman -- is actually present. These are your Constitutional rights and even the Dies Committee cannot gainsay you.

But to return to the subject of these little private questionings. Normally, everyone would be anxious to cooperate with a Congressional Committee -- and the first reaction would be to answer questions asked. But the record of the Dies Committee speaks for itself. That record shows that misrepresentation has been consistently employed by the Committee to make its points, and very little attention has been paid to facts. The Committee's record clearly shows that it is not interested in fair play or in an objective presentation of the facts. To answer questions put by Dies' agents at your home or office is to put you in a completely defenseless position. What they report on your answers only they themselves know.

Because facts may be distorted and given apart from surrounding circumstances, we believe that your best protection is to refuse to answer questions except before the Committee and pursuant to a subpoena. We suggest you read the pamphlet called INVESTIGATING COMMITTEES AND CIVIL RIGHTS, prepared by the legal counsel of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties. You can get it from our office for 5¢ per copy. Also, telephone the Washington Committee or the National Federation if accosted by Dies' agents.

In conclusion, don't be too alarmed if the Dies' agents drop in for a chit-chat. It is perfectly all right merely to remark on the weather and bid them good-day.

Sincerely,

"The purposes of this organization shall be to assert, defend and extend the rights of individuals and groups to organize to these ends. This is a non-profit organization and shall not engage in any partisan political electioneering."—By-laws, Article II.

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Washington Committee for Democratic Action

Chapter, National Federation for Constitutional Liberties

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1410 H Street, N. W.—Room 312—Phone NAtional 3765—Washington, D. C.

July 1, 1941.

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Dear Friend:

Immediate action is required to safeguard Labor's Right to Strike!

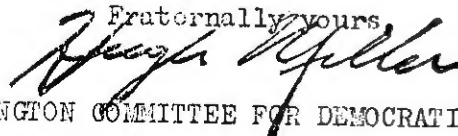
Following the use of the United States Army to break the North American Aviation Plant strike in California a flood of anti-labor legislation was introduced in both the House and the Senate.

The most dangerous measure right now is the May-Connally amendment to the Selective Service Act. This amendment is an omnibus amendment which incorporates in it many of the worst features of the Vinson bill. This amendment would:

- (1) provide for the seizure of struck plants when workers fail to use the Mediation Board or refuse to accept its decision, and for the return of these plants to their former management when the strike is broken;
- (2) make it unlawful for pickets to interfere with strike breakers going in and out of struck plants, and
- (3) define as sabotage punishable by five years imprisonment or \$5,000 fine, or both, any violation of the provisions of the amendment.

This amendment will come up for House action July 8th. There must be immediate protest. Other proposals for compulsory arbitration, enforced waiting periods, the use of troops to break strikes, may come before Congress for action at any time and without notice. Your wire and resolution should oppose the May-Connally amendment and any other anti-labor legislation, and should be addressed to the Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn. We urge your organization to take this action at once.

Fraternally yours



WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION.

National Federation for Constitutional Liberties

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FREE SPEECH

NEWSLETTER OF THE WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION

ON GUARD

-A rousing ACTION CONFERENCE of more than 200 workers, teachers, lawyers, newspapermen, and government employees, representing unions, farm groups, and civil liberties organizations throughout the country, last week marked the coming of age of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties.

In a series of ACTION meetings on the Right of Franchise, Labor's Rights, Racial Discrimination, and Freedom of Speech, Press, and Assembly, outstanding leaders in the nation-wide fight for civil liberties discussed pressing current issues, exchanged experiences in meeting them, and adopted concrete proposals for ACTION and for strengthening organization so that constituent groups may act in unison on short notice.

Of special interest to Washington is the establishment of a National Committee for the protection of the Rights of Government Workers which will be the bulwark of all whose civil rights are threatened by governmental employers, be they federal, state, county or municipal.

Throughout the Conference, special emphasis was placed on the attacks upon labor and an extensive action program was adopted against the Vinson Bill and other anti-labor legislation.

The Conference and its accomplishments signal the awareness that civil liberties are a national issue and must be defended on a national scale. The enthusiasm of the delegates, and the tales they told, are eloquent proof that the People mean to retain their sacred heritage of freedom and are organizing on an unprecedented scale to do it.

 * HAVE YOU PAID YOUR 1941 DUES ? *

Witch Hunt 1941!

The Civil Service Commission was organized in 1883 to protect Government workers who were peculiarly vulnerable as political footballs. It has had a long and honorable tradition of public service. It has now become so forgetful of those traditions that the practices of its investigators are a source of alarm to all persons concerned with the preservation of democratic institutions.

When the first stories of Civil Service grillings were told by people who had experienced them, incredulity, skepticism, and even flat disbelief was the response. Now it has become clear that standards of conduct in every field of action, personal or civic, that have endured for the 150 years since the framing of our Constitution, have been discarded overnight - a usurpation of authority by the Civil Service Commission that has gone unregarded and unrebuked by the Government.

If Government workers were only growing wrinkles and furrowed brows wondering whether there was anything wrong in a date, a beer, or a lecture or meeting they attended last year or the year before that, it might seem somewhat funny, but the real and serious effect is a sapping of the kind of morale that made us a free nation instead of a British colony. New standards of conduct acceptable to the Commission have not been made public.

Some of the details of the Civil Service grillings are set down in Witch Hunt, 1941, Hits Government Workers, a pamphlet issued by the Washington Committee. The booklet costs 5 cents. It tells a fully documented, sober story that will have repercussions on your life, whether you will or no. It also tells what the Washington Committee is doing to protect the rights of Government workers from such attacks. Mail a copy to your friends and acquaintances. Ask them to make it a chain effort.

STOP THE VINSON BILL

The Vinson Bill is the most immediate and most serious menace the organized labor movement faces today. It is the top mark yet reached in the anti-labor offensive now being waged in Congress with the assistance and encouragement of the Administration. It is also the most glaring example of the blitzkrieg speed with which this anti-union drive is being conducted. Only two days were allowed for hearings on the bill; only two witnesses were heard. One of them, the Secretary of the Navy, took 80 per cent of that time in giving the bill the official blessing of the Administration. The remaining one hour of testimony was allotted to one union representative who spoke against the bill. No other witnesses were permitted to appear. A representative of the CIO was bluntly told by the Committee Chairman, Rep. Carl Vinson of Georgia, that the House Naval Affairs Committee would hear no further witnesses.

The Vinson Bill, HR 4139, contains provisions to maintain the open shop in unorganized industries, to make union

organizing practically impossible, to make active union members subject to discharge at the sole discretion of the employer, and to impose a 25 day "cooling-off" period between a strike vote and strike action.

The bill has been reported out, to be rushed through Congress, in the hope that it will pass the House within less than a week. It has already met with such stiff opposition from the heads of the AFL and CIO as well as other groups, that the press and other anti-labor groups are willing to sugarcoat the bill. Their "compromise" is to drop the open-shop provision but to get the rest of the bill through. The National Federation for Constitutional Liberties, at its conference, mapped out a vigorous national campaign to stop this bill. You can help by the following actions:

1. Send letters and telegrams to your own Congressmen and Senators, against the Vinson Bill (HR 4139) in any form.
2. Propose resolutions censuring the House Naval Affairs Committee for the high-handed dictatorial method by which it handled the bill.

"The Best That Is In Me"

The standing ovation for Edwin S. Smith member of the NLRB, was a moving tribute to a great and courageous man by the 800 people who filled the Press Club Auditorium on April 22, to hear him, Clifford T. McAvoy, Deputy Commissioner of N.Y.C. Department of Welfare, and Harold Christoffel, Chairman of the Allis-Chalmers Local United Automobile Workers, speak on various aspects of the defense of civil liberties today. Mr. McAvoy warned of the "New Inquisition" which, wearing a false face of "patriotism" is doing its utmost to subvert our democratic form of Government. Mr. Christoffel gripped his audience with his description of the unity of the Allis-Chalmers strikers and their successful resistance to every attempt - from tricky promises to intimidation and outright police violence - to break the strike.

Mr. Smith said:

"It is not easy to act straight and to

think straight when partisans of reaction are ready to pour forth all their arsenal of villification against those who dare to defend the things which make America worth fighting for. Nor, on the other hand, is it easy to deny the truth as you see it or to refrain from protesting injustice. If this be the choice that each of us has to make, there can be only one answer - I believe in democracy and for its sake I will give now and in the future the best that is in me."

Rev. Owen Knox, Chairman of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties was Chairman. The meeting was the culmination of the very important conference held the same week end. The size and enthusiasm of the audience showed there are many people behind the Washington Committee for Democratic Action. It's doing a big job well, but can do better with more help.

EARS ON YOUR WIRES

A slick rush job to put the Hobbs Wiretapping Bill (HR 4228) through Congress is now being tried. This bill, formerly HR 2266, was analyzed in our last issue. The published stories of nationally known reporters add up to the following picture: At first a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee heard flat opposition to wiretapping by spokesmen for Railroad Brotherhoods, AFL CIO, religious, civil rights (including your own Washington Committee), business and civic groups. The only supporters were Congressman Hobbs (Alabama: poll tax), Alexander Holtzoff, FBI Counsel and the real author of the bill, and a clubwoman. Impatient at the delay, Chairman Summers cut short the hearings, took the bill out of the subcommittee's hands, and ordered secret hearings by the full committee. There, Attorney General Jackson's testimony for wiretapping was heard and printed; Federal Communication's Chairman Fly's, against the bill, was not printed. AFL, CIO, and the Railroad Brotherhoods, as well as many local unions, civil rights committees, including both the Washington Committee and the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties have testified against the bill. There are so many more in addition that hearings before the House Judiciary Committee have been extended to April 30. You can help stop this bill by writing or wiring Rep. Hatton Summers, Chairman, House Judiciary Committee, and your Congressman.

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Municipal Assembly Starts

The first city council of voteless Washingtonians - the Municipal Assembly - was created on Wednesday, March 19, at a meeting attended by delegates from hundreds of local organizations.

Modeled after a city council, the Assembly is intended to unite and to express the sentiments of District citizens on all questions of civic life. A preview of the kind of problems which will be tackled was provided at the first meeting by a panel on suffrage, housing, and relief. Officers were elected and committees organized on April 16th. Watch the Assembly - it's going places.

DEFENSE OF GOV'T WORKERS

A delegation led by Rev. Knox, Chairman of the NFCL last week visited the Civil Service Commission to protest the Commission's inquisitorial investigation of government workers. The delegation, consisting of representatives of the WCDA, NFCL, FAECT, New York Conference for Inalienable Rights, Washington IUC, and UFWA, spent 2 hours with the Commission. The Commission promised a written reply to demands for a procedure to be followed in investigations including the right to counsel, hearing, transcript of proceedings, and restraint from objectionable questioning.

#

The Washington Committee, in a long and detailed letter, protested to the Commission the discharge of Julius Schlesinger after an investigation and upon charges that constitute flagrant disregard of the rights of government employees. Other organizations are being asked to cooperate in an extensive campaign on this case which represents the worst features of the Commission's present general practices.

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UFWA has taken an active part in the case of Margaret Ostow November and is now negotiating with the War Department for her reinstatement. WCDA will continue the campaign which it began on Mrs. November's behalf and will cooperate fully with UFWA and the other organizations now interested in the case.

#

Memos:

✓ Have you written your congressman to sign the petition to bring the poll tax bill out of committee? If not, write him or otherwise advise him of your stand. If you have done this, do it again this week.

✓ A District Affairs Committee has just been set up. It has a place for you whether your special interest or pet peeve is housing, health, suffrage, education, traffic problems, legislation, or just all of civic life. Call the office for details.

✓ The Washington Committee has frequently received requests for speakers. If any of the membership feels any urge to speak, let the office have your name.

7000 JOBS FOR NEGROES AT GLENN L. MARTIN

There is said to be a shortage of skilled workers for defense production. Yet, the National Negro Congress found, when it investigated, that of several thousand workers placed by the D. C. Employment Service during a six-month period, only 1% of Negro women and 2% of Negro men had been placed in skilled jobs. Convinced that this percentage was not a fair proportion of skilled Negro workers applying for jobs, the NNC undertook to register the Negro workers in Washington eligible for jobs in National Defense. Many of the 700 registrants reported that they had not registered at the D. C. Employment office because of its well-known practice of placing skilled Negro workers in domestic jobs.

During the registration, about a dozen clear-cut cases of discrimination against Negroes in Government defense agencies were uncovered. Five of these cases have already been taken up with the Civil Service Commission. The Commission disclaimed responsibility. However, the Commission said it was considering setting up Jim Crow units in the Government, asked what difference it made to the National Negro Congress if the Negro workers were segregated - as long as they had jobs.

Glenn L. Martin Aircraft doesn't worry about segregation or unemployed Negroes. It just doesn't give jobs to Negroes. Glenn Martin has received Government contracts amounting to \$322,000,000. In the newly expanded plant 40,000 workers will be employed. Negroes are nearly one-fifth of the population in the Baltimore and Washington area. The National Negro Congress is demanding a proportionate share of jobs for the Negro population of this area, 7000 jobs for Negroes at Glenn L. Martin!

Over six hundred delegates met April 27 in Baltimore to translate into action the slogans:

JOBS ARE WHAT WE WANT!

JOBS WE MUST HAVE

LET'S FIGHT FOR 7000 JOBS AT GLENN

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NO CONCENTRATION CAMPS HERE

The Hobbs Bill (HR 3) would establish the principle of concentration camps in America. Introduced by Rep. Sam Hobbs of (Poll Tax) Alabama, it provides detention for non-citizens ordered deported but whose deportation cannot be effected. In many cases "detention" will mean life imprisonment. The bill broadens the basis for deportation of non-citizens to include persons believed to be "subversive", members of minority parties, and active trade unionists. It could easily be extended to include all sections of the population, once the principle of concentration camps had been established as part of the law.

Present situation: HR 3 was reported favorably without public hearings by the House Judiciary Committee, as drafted by administration officials. Its enactment was requested by Attorney General Jackson. Subsequently, it was returned to the Judiciary Committee for hearings. Hearings are now being held. Last year, the Concentration Camp bill was defeated by popular opposition after it had been passed by the House.

Action: Wire or write your Congressman urging that he oppose this bill. Ask him to have your communication inserted in the record of the hearings on the bill.

* * *

Rent Control Needed Now

The Washington Committee for Democratic Action is backing the Randolph Rent Control Bill (HR 3736) to set up a Rent Commission to control rents in the District. It would freeze rents as of the date of passage for the property (not just the present tenant); permit downward as well as upward revision of rents on the complaint of landlord or tenant; impose penalties on landlords who raised rents or reduced normal services.

ACTION: 1. Get signatures to the petition for the bill.

2. Urge your organizations to pass supporting resolutions; send them to Hon. Jennings Randolph, House District Committee.

3. Report increases, etc. to us.

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

"Thank God we have a system of labor where there can be a strike."

(Hartford, Conn., March 5, 1860)

★ THE right to strike is essential to the preservation of democracy. If the right to strike is destroyed, trade unions will be destroyed and American democracy will be destroyed.

★ WE, the undersigned, petition that the Congress shall adopt no legislation and shall repeal existing laws which directly or indirectly curtail or endanger any of these rights.

[illegible]

Prepared by the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties

1410 H St., N. W. WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION

Washington, D. C.

CHAPTER. NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR CONSTITUTIONAL LIBERTIES

NW 52770 DocId:34357207 Page 10 1410 H STREET, N.W.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

NATIONAL 3765

LET FREEDOM RING AT HOME

*Safeguard
the* **BILL
OF RIGHTS**

We Pledge to Support the
DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS
*Guaranteed
by the* **CONSTITUTION**

"The purposes of this organization shall be to assert, defend and extend the democratic process, to maintain constitutional procedure and civil rights, to promote the general economic and social welfare, and to defend the constitutional rights of all individuals and groups to organize to these ends. This is a non-profit organization and shall not engage in any partisan political electioneering."—BY LAWS, ARTICLE II:

Washington Committee for Democratic Action



Our Fathers Said THEN:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

We Say NOW:

Defend and extend the right of labor, farmers, and the common people to secure a higher standard of living and to better their social and economic life.

Defend and extend the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively. Defend the Wagner Act.

Oppose distortion of the Sherman Anti-Trust Law to prosecute labor.

Oppose nullification of the Wage-Hour law.

Support the right of the unemployed to jobs at wages that insure a decent standard of living, and the right to adequate relief if jobs are not provided.

Support the demands of youth for jobs and educational opportunities. Support the American Youth Act.

Demand equal political, economic, educational, cultural, and social opportunities for the Negro people.

THEN: *"Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."*

FIRST AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION

We Say NOW:

Support the right of all people—of labor, of the unemployed, of racial and political minorities—to freedom of thought, speech and assembly.

Protect the right of new parties and minority parties to place their candidates on the ballot, and protect the right of citizens to vote as they choose.

Defend the political rights of the unemployed, and their right to organize.

Oppose restrictions on the civil rights of aliens and the foreign-born.

Defend the right of farmers and consumers to organize to protect themselves.

Oppose vigorously all anti-Semitic propaganda and acts.

THEN: *"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the things to be seized."*

We Say NOW

Stop illegal searches of the American people by the Department of Justice.

Abolish the Dies Committee.

Prosecute vigorously the Associated Farmers.

Support the Wagner Act.

Put an end to political persecution.

THEN: *"In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the nature and number of the law of the land, and to be heard in his own defense, and to be confronted with the witnesses against him; and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense."*

We Say NOW

Demand the full right of trial by jury.

THEN: *"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted."*

We Say NOW

Oppose the illegal denial of political minorities, of racial minorities, of defenders of civil rights.

Stop the practice of imposing excessive bail, of denying a fair trial by an impartial jury.

THEN: *"No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."*

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

We Say NOW

Oppose all restrictions on the constitutional rights of citizens.

Outlaw all poll taxes.

Oppose all attempts to remove government employees on account of race.

Repeal the Hatch Act.

THEN: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

FOURTH AMENDMENT

We Say NOW:

Stop illegal searches and seizures, and other illegal terrorization of the American people by the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, and other agencies.

Abolish the Dies Committee.
Prosecute vigorously all violations of the law by the Ku Klux Klan, the Associated Farmers, and other vigilante gangs.
Support the Wagner-Gavagan Anti-Lynch Bill.
Put an end to police brutality.

THEN:

"In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right of a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense."

SIXTH AMENDMENT

We Say NOW:

Demand the full protection of the law for accused persons.

THEN:

"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted."

EIGHTH AMENDMENT

We Say NOW:

Oppose the illegal persecution of representatives of labor, of political minorities, of Negro and other racial minorities, and of deniers of civil rights.

Stop the practices of holding prisoners without charge, of imposing excessive bail, or denying the right to consult counsel and to fair trial by an impartial jury.

THEN:

"No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States, or by any State, on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT

We Say NOW:

Oppose all restrictions on the right to vote and on the constitutional rights of citizens.

Outlaw all poll taxes.

Oppose all attempts to restrict the rights of citizenship of government employees.

Repeal the Hatch Act.

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Program for Washington NOW

and full right of suffrage, including local suffrage, for the District of Columbia, and oppose any reorganization that does not include local suffrage.

★

Demand immediate passage of the District Civil Rights Bill abolishing discrimination against Negroes in public buildings and places.

Stop police brutality and the terrorization of the Negro people by the local police force.

Oppose all discrimination against Negroes in the Government service, and demand that the ban against the employment of Negroes in stenographic, clerical, and professional positions be lifted.

★

Demand the establishment by the District Government of a District Department.

Demand increased relief appropriations to provide not only for employables, but for employable workers unable to secure WPA work.

Demand the Surplus Food Stamp Plan for the District of Columbia.

Demand an adequate budget to improve welfare, health, housing, education, and recreation in the District.

Oppose the sales tax. Support the income tax.

★

Protect the rights of government employees to freedom of speech, action, and collective bargaining.

Prevent discriminatory treatment which results in the denial of political rights, and in an unequal economic burden, such as arbitrary pay cuts, overtime without compensation, and furloughs, in the name of economy or emergency.

★

WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION

1653 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.

Washington, D. C. • Phone: NAational 3765

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Washington Committee for Democratic Action

WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION
Chapter, National Federation for Constitutional Liberties
1410 H. St., Room 312, Washington, D.C.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A protest against recent action of the Dies Committee in sending its agents to question government workers in their offices on government time was sent today to Speaker Rayburn by the Washington Committee for Democratic Action.

The text of the letter follows:

"We wish to call your attention to the newest attempt of the Dies Committee to overstep the legislative authority which created it, and to invade the Constitutional rights of the citizen.

"The Committee is currently sending out agents to question Government employees, on Government time, as to their private activities and personal beliefs. This questioning constitutes an unwarranted inquisition into the personal affairs of Government workers. Obviously, such abuse of power on the part of one Congressional Committee reflects on the dignity and prestige of the entire Congress. That the Dies Committee should spend taxpayer's money in such an irresponsible and unaccountable fashion also raises grave doubts as to its actual objectives--- is the Committee concerned with the real enemies of democracy, or is it bent on the destruction of civil liberties?

"We strongly protest this newest perversion of the Dies Committee's objectives, and request that public statements be made by you in condemnation of the Committee's vicious disregard of Government employees' civil rights."

Washington Committee for Democratic Action

Chapter, National Federation for Constitutional Liberties

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ACTION LETTER

Protest to the Civil Service Commission the Dismissal of Morris Tepping

Situation: By a letter dated May 27, the Civil Service Commission instructed the Federal Security Agency to remove Morris Tepping from his position with the Social Security Board. The Social Security Board on June 9, 1941, furnished Tepping. The Commission has set a hearing on his case for July 11.

Background: Morris Tepping has been an active member of Local 10 of the UFWA, and is president of the Washington Youth Council. In March 1941, he was grilled by agents of the Commission concerning his political opinions, membership in organizations, opinions of his friends, and details of his personal life. He was denied the right to be informed of the purpose of the investigation and of the charges against him, the right to representation and the right to a transcript. On May 27, 1941, the Commission wrote to the Federal Security Agency, instructing it to remove Tepping because:

"An investigation of his character and suitability for government employment developed considerable evidence of Mr. Tepping's interest in and connection with people, causes, and organizations with radical and Communistic tendencies."

On June 9, 1941, the Social Security Board notified Tepping that his appointment as Junior Economic Analyst would be terminated at the expiration of his annual leave, and that

"This action is taken at the direction of the Civil Service Commission and not as the result of dissatisfaction with your work or conduct in office."

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STATEMENT BY DR. MAX YERGAN ON HIS NON-REAPPOINTMENT AS LECTURER IN NEGRO
HISTORY AT THE COLLEGE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Are Negroes to be permanently appointed, with tenure, to teaching positions in the city-supported colleges of New York? That is the question brought sharply into focus by a letter which I have received from Dr. J. Salwyn Schapiro, Acting Chairman of the Department of History of the College of the City of New York.

Dr. Schapiro's letter, dated March 31st, 1941, which reached my hands on April 18th, informed me of the decision of the Appointments Committee of City College, not to reappoint me as lecturer in Negro History. The letter states, as the reason for the decision, that it is the policy of the Department to change the personnel of these lectureships from time to time.

This decision draws public attention and opposition to the practice of the Board of Higher Education which has barred Negroes from regular teaching positions in the four city-supported colleges. It exposes the nature and purpose of the attack now being made in New York on public education, and it reveals the irresponsible and misleading methods used by the educational authorities concerned in the present action.

The public has recognized the broader issues which my non-reappointment raises. As a result, campaigns and public meetings are being held around the questions of the permanent employment of Negro teachers in the four city-supported colleges and the freedom of teachers to work for democracy in college and community. I heartily support these campaigns now being conducted by the Teachers Union Committee for Defense of Public Education, by the Greater New York Coordinating Committee for Employment and by other public bodies.

The issues stated above are the real ones. The question of my dismissal from or reappointment to City College, as it affects me, is of quite secondary importance. I shall now refer, however, to the alleged reasons for my non-reappointment merely to show their lack of foundation and to point to the real explanation of the action of the educational authorities in my case.

Three different reasons have been given for my non-reappointment by the educational authorities concerned. One was reportedly stated by Dr. Harry N. Wright, Acting President of City College, in the Amsterdam Star-News of May 3rd. In that interview, which was both discourteous and tended to reflect upon my ability, Dr. Wright is quoted as saying that I was not reappointed because I had not demonstrated any special scholarship.

The question of scholarship and my ability and fitness to lecture at City College must have been dealt with satisfactorily by Dr. Wright's predecessor in office and by the Board of Higher Education. The College Administration and the Appointments Committee were well aware of my qualifications when I was first asked to lecture. For three successive years I have been reappointed and at no time during this period has my work at the College been questioned or any official criticism of it brought to my attention. As a matter of fact, neither the present Acting President nor any member of the Appointments Committee has ever visited a single one of my lectures, shown any interest whatsoever in the course or discussed it with me since my connection with the College began.

The Public and those individuals desirous of knowing the quality of scholarship in my work may be informed by examining what I have written, said and done both with regard to the people of Africa and the status of Negroes in America. My scholarship, in these respects, speaks for itself.

I might point out that the purpose of scholarship in this course in Negro History is to disclose the culture of the Negro people and its place in world culture; to study those forces which account for the present status of the Negro population in America; to expose and correct the misrepresentation of the past of the Negro people; and to discuss how Negroes may continue their contributions to cultural progress and the strengthening of democracy in America. I submit that the course has been achieving that purpose.

With further reference to the question of scholarship, I quote from a letter written on May 10th, 1941, by Professor Morton Gottschall, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of City College, to Mr. George Marshall, 38 East 57th Street, New York City. Dean Gottschall says:

"The non-reappointment of Dr. Yergan cannot in any way be construed as a reflection on his ability and attainments."

I now point out the second alleged reason for my non-reappointment. Dr. J. Salwyn Schapiro, in his letter to me, referred to at the beginning of this statement, gives a quite different explanation. I quote from his letter as follows:

"It is the policy of the Department to change the personnel of these special lectureships from time to time, in order that the students may get the benefit of different personalities.

"Therefore, the Appointments Committee has decided to make a new appointment for the lectureship in Negro History for the term beginning, February 1942."

This reason is, in itself, ridiculous and absurd. The students taking the course, which I give at City College, have contact with the lecturer in that course only once during their entire college career. It follows that the explanation given by Dr. Schapiro has no basis of support in fact. Evidently the Acting Chairman of the Department of History and the Acting President of the College did not confer with each other before stating their different reasons. At any rate, it is perfectly clear that the reasons given are wholly inadequate, misleading and evasive of the real reason.

The third explanation given for my non-reappointment was that reportedly advanced by Mrs. Ruth S. Shoup, Secretary of the Board of Higher Education of New York City and a member of its Conduct Committee. In its issue of April 27th, the New York Times reports that Mrs. Shoup explained that each year fifteen or twenty teachers without tenure are not granted further appointments to the college staff and that the action in my case was "a perfectly routine matter". It is difficult to describe as a "perfectly routine matter" an action which required the quality of conflicting explanations such as were given by the Acting President of the College and the Acting Chairman of the Department of History after I have been at City College for four years.

Further, if Mrs. Shoup is correct in saying that my non-reappointment was a "perfectly routine matter", there are large organizations and many individuals who question that routine.

It is clear that the alleged reasons for my non-reappointment, given above are mere pretexts. Let us now examine the real reasons.

At the hearings conducted by the Rapp-Coudert Committee, their star witness referred to a "class in Negro History" and gave the impression that the class was attended and made popular by Young Communist League students. That was sufficient to subject me to the now-well-known smearing campaign. My non-reappointment followed the Rapp-Coudert hearings.

It appears, therefore, that it is political considerations which dictated this action of the authorities of City College and not interest in scholarship or personality with regard to the course in Negro History. It should be pointed out that every gain which the course has made has been due to student and teacher effort and not to the College Administration. The course in Negro History is given, not because the college authorities planned it, but because students and teachers recognized the need for it and insisted upon having it. The present attack made by the college authorities upon me is, therefore, an attack upon the democratic forces within the college. Those are the forces which the college authorities wish to suppress and, now that they are enabled, are trying to do so effectively. This attack falls upon the Negro people and all who work in their interest.

Why did the educational authorities desire my removal from City College and why have they sought to discredit me? The answer is not far to seek. My position in the National Negro Congress, my criticism of the anti-Negro policy of the government in its "defense program", my opposition to discrimination and Jim Crowism against Negroes in the general job life of America as well as in our public social life - these form the real reason which explains the action of the College Administration in not reappointing me.

Let us return, however, to the immediate broader question of permanent lectureships for Negroes in the four municipal colleges. The Mayor of the City of New York has had placed in his hands the full record of a Negro professor who recently applied for a full-time teaching position at City College. This applicant's record, including his doctoral work in one of the nation's oldest and most renowned universities, is of the highest possible order. His academic rating in college and in graduate school placed him in the first class. He was highly recommended by those who supervised his graduate work. He has not been appointed and it is claimed that his application has not had due consideration.

Let the Board of Higher Education publicly declare a policy with regard to the permanent employment of Negro teachers in the four city colleges, and let it give evidence of its good faith by appointing qualified Negroes immediately. When the educational authorities and the Board can clear themselves of anti-Negro bias, then they will be in position to ask the public to believe the flimsy and inconsistent reasons which they give for not reappointing me. Until the authorities and the Board make clear a non-discriminatory policy, and express it in action, they cannot escape the charge of racial bias and political opportunism.

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page 3.

was recognized by a "witness", whereupon J.B. Matthews, Dies Committee "expert", summoned the union man from the audience, ordered him to take the witness stand, swore him in, and proceeded to question him. This was done without a subpoena, without any legal basis for the committee's behavior. When, after answering several improper questions, the witness asked for an opportunity to secure advice, the hearing was abruptly adjourned. The newspapers carried sensational stories of the hearing, intended to embarrass the union in the midst of its negotiations before the Defense Mediation Board. The effect of these attacks in the press was to delay negotiations.

Action:

1. Wire or write your Congressman condemning the strike-breaking actions of the Dies Committee.
2. Express your support to UAW-CIO Local 683, c/o Los Angeles Industrial Union Council, 5851/50th^{South} Avalon Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. in the union's right to bargain collectively without intimidation by the Dies Committee.

JACKSON CALLS NAMES

On May 7, 1941, Attorney General Jackson delivered a speech before the American Judicature Society which Washington people termed "incredible".

Mr. Jackson charged that "our American method of protecting our liberties" by reliance upon "a written Constitution" has resulted in the establishment of "rigid, parchment freedoms". He saw a direct relationship between the fact that the American Bill of Rights is "uncompromising" and the fact that "every period in our national history which has felt great stress and tension from abroad has left a trail in the administration of justice that we do not re-trace with pride". Thus the Palmer raids and vigilante movements stem directly from our "parchment freedoms". The greatest danger he saw to American civil liberties lay "in the fact that they are so rigid".

Mr. Jackson then launched into an attack upon effective civil liberties organizations. He listed several pieces of pending legislation which have his approval as techniques for defending liberty against the dangers engendered by the "uncompromising" character of the American Bill of Rights. He listed the present Hobbs concentration camp and Hobbs wiretapping bills. Then, in what is perhaps the most remarkable passage ever spoken by a United States Attorney General, he characterized as "enemies of America", all persons who oppose these bills or who defend persons charged with crimes, or who criticize "investigative officials". These are his words:

"And let me say to you that the enemies of America are not idle. They show up at Congressional hearings to oppose every move to strengthen our law enforcement; they show up in court astutely to raise every legal difficulty to prevent convictions and to obstruct obtaining evidence; they propagandize endlessly against investigative officials and agencies, against prosecution policies, against law enforcement itself."

Attorney General Jackson's speech is a direct incitement to and an advanced apology for lawlessness by law enforcing officials. It undermines the loyalty